

Assessing Food Safety Culture at a Prominent South African Agro-Processor for Rinse-Before-Use (RBU) and Ready-To-Eat (RTE) Produce

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Abstract

Introduction: Food safety culture saves lives however a poor safety culture can also result in severe disease and/or death. In the context of agro processing, an increase in the consumption of raw leafy green vegetables has been noticeable and has highlighted the safety risk associated with such consumption. Ready-to-eat (RTE) salads are a convenient way to ensure the intake of vegetables, but consumers need to be confident that the products are safe to eat. Consumers appreciate leafy green vegetables such as baby leaves for their convenience and wholesomeness and for adding a variety of tastes and colours to their plates and often eat them raw or minimally processed.

Problem Statement: Failure to comply with quality and food safety management system requirements can be both widespread and problematic since knowledge does not equal behaviour. Foodborne illnesses remain underreported in transition countries, for example, South Africa, and are more informally documented due to a lack of surveillance systems (Grace et al., 2015).

Objectives: To conduct a critical review of literature on broader food safety culture, emphasizing the agro-processing environment in South Africa, its importance to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and challenges in the South African Agro-processing sector.

To assess the food safety culture at a prominent South African fresh produce agro processor through qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

To determine the factors that influence the organisation's prevailing FS culture.

To propose recommendations and interventions to improve the food safety culture at the agro processor.

Research Framework: An adapted framework from FoodFocus©, a Food Safety Culture Consulting firm in South Africa, will be used. It shows elements used to analyse an organisation's prevailing FS-culture i.e., the human constructs of the company in terms of the organisation's dimensions: "Vision", "Inspiration", "Empowerment", "Food Safety Performance", and "Change Appetite". The environmental constructs of the organisation: Process; Equipment; People (Policies & Training) will be assessed by use of an observational checklist.

Conclusion: The information obtained from this study will increase food safety awareness and improve the behaviour of employees, elevate business performance, remain compliant, and reduce non-conformities in the agro-processing industry.